

Infinite Hope by gleefulmusings

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Summary:

Mike loves his sister too much to let fear get the better of her.

Infinite Hope

Author's Note:

IDEK. I just binge-watched the entire season and it left me with so many FEELS for these characters, as well as a new OT3. So welcome to my word salad. Sorry.

Mike Wheeler *feels* things.

He rather wished he didn't.

His life would be a lot easier if he could flip a switch and extinguish his emotions and revel in the ruthless logic of Lucas, or the blunt impulsiveness of Dustin.

However, those are their gifts, not his. He feels *everything*. It's like that crappy makeup kit Nancy got with her perfume, an unwelcome gift with purchase; you don't want it, but also feel you can't return it. It was something unloaded upon you and your permission wasn't necessary. You didn't deserve it, you didn't *earn* it, but you must suffer with it.

Or for it.

He's frankly tired of suffering. That is all his emotions have brought to his life: pain and misery and sacrifice. Yet his feelings spur him. They drive him and, in return, allow him to drive others. He doesn't like it, but he does accept it. He's had no other choice.

Lucas knew *things*. Dustin knew *people*.

Mike thought it must be very comforting to *know*, to believe so *utterly*, to color within the lines and make beautiful pictures out of a world so terribly messy.

He sometimes wondered when it was, when the precise moment occurred, that had cemented their dynamic so concretely.

Logic and reason ruled the world of Lucas Sinclair, and though he

allowed for extraordinary circumstances, he maintained his belief that there was a natural order, that everything conformed to a set of laws, even if he didn't necessarily understand them yet. The bottom line, for Lucas, was that those laws were *knowable* through exploration, experimentation, and extrapolation.

Dustin Henderson was a savant of human behavior. He had the ability to glance at a person and understand, to *know*, what made them tick. He also had no compunction about blurting it out. He had the tendency to blurt out whatever he thought. This trait was all the more annoying because he was usually right. That just grated, but not as much as when he trained his insight on his friends with pinpoint accuracy. He knew them better than they knew themselves.

And Will. Sweet, gentle Will was the least complicated of all of them, but in the most complicated of ways. He was just as intelligent and insightful, but also more circumspect and tactful. He was quiet, easy, and undemanding. His optimism was relentless. That was why, when he had been lost, his absence had almost destroyed them.

That just left Mike himself. It had taken him a while to understand his role in all of this, let alone come to terms with and accept it. He eventually had because there had been no other choice. Somehow along the way, and without his consent, he had become their leader. Not because of his great intelligence, not because of his keen insight, and not because of his idealism.

It was because he married all of the best traits of his best friends. He was the emotional nexus.

He felt *everything*. All the time.

Lucas and Dustin were the poles, diametrically opposed to each other but essential to keeping their small, insular world spinning on its axis. Will was their world itself and therefore the most innocent and vulnerable of them all. And Mike was their core. He kept them spinning.

He lacked Dustin's trepidation, Lucas's utilitarianism, and Will's humility. He had some measure of them, which was what allowed him to understand and empathize with his friends so well.

He possessed all of these qualities, but they didn't rule him. His heart did.

Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point. French. Pascal. The heart has its reasons, whereof reason knows nothing.

Good old Mrs. Who. No wonder *A Wrinkle in Time* was one of his favorite books.

And if Mr. Clarke thought he had fooled them with his little paper plate demonstration, the man was loopy. It had been totally cribbed from Mrs. Whatsit. Like four geeks of their stature wouldn't understand the allusion to the tesseract?

Mike had been the first to *feel* Will was still alive. That led the others to believe it.

He had been the first to *feel* Eleven could be trusted, that she was their hero. That led the others to believe it ... eventually.

He was always the first to feel everything, even if he didn't understand those feelings or why he was having them. He wasn't even sure he trusted them. He thought he was rather foolhardy for always leading with his emotions for, when he was wrong, the unintended inflicted wounds were the most difficult to bear.

Still, it was what *he* knew, and he knew what he felt from the three seated before him.

His sister Nancy, her boyfriend Steve, and whatever the hell Jonathan was supposed to be, were sitting on the couch and staring at him blankly.

He could *feel* Nancy's impatience and fury. He wasn't surprised; they were often each other's targets. She was unable or unwilling to vent her anger at their parents for their desire to present the perfect picture of middle-class excellence. She couldn't scream her rage at her fellow classmates, too invested in her reputation as the pretty and popular ingénue, the one whose looks and brains would see her rise above Nowhere, Indiana. She couldn't properly mourn Barb, because doing so would be erroneously seen as seething resentment at Will's

survival.

That just left him, and he was fine with it. She usually fulfilled the same role for him.

Steve was aggressively ignorant. It was all the more bothersome because it was willful and something in which he took great pride. Beneath the thin veneer of superficiality, however, was the heart of a good person who too often made poor decisions. He loved Nancy, truly and sincerely loved her, but was weighted down by the belief she was too good for him. He was terrified she would one day see that for herself, that she would one day see the empty husk he was convinced he was.

Except that he wasn't. Steve was kind of like him.

Mike felt *so much* that he allowed it to lead him and then others, whereas Steve felt things so strongly, he repressed them and sought to deny he felt anything at all. For Steve, *feeling* meant *fear*, and that overrode every other emotion. He compensated by turning every feeling into a joke. Humor as deflection. Textbook.

Mike *felt* that, for Steve, Nancy was *it*. The pinnacle. The majestic mountain that even brave men dare not approach. She was vast and insurmountable and unconquerable. What he didn't get was that Nancy didn't need or want to be conquered; she just wanted to be understood.

Enter Jonathan. He was Nancy's emotional and intellectual equal, though his reins were coiled just as tightly as those of Steve. As Steve used humor, Jonathan used silence. He had cultivated the image of an outcast, someone mysterious and therefore problematic and potentially dangerous. It had worked. He had alienated most of the school, who in turn left him alone to his thoughts, which subsumed larger and larger pieces of his psyche every day.

Then Will had been taken and Jonathan's world had collapsed.

As often as they frustrated each other, at the end of the day, Mike and Nancy also knew how much they were loved by the other. Jonathan was fiercely protective of and loyal to Will, having virtually

raised him. He was brother and father, the sum total of Will's perception of what it was to be a man. It must have been very difficult for both of them, to depend on each other so completely and then have it ripped away.

They needed each other. All of them. It was so obvious, so painfully obvious, to everyone but them. So, once again, Mike would take the lead and get them where they needed to go.

"What is it?" an exasperated Nancy finally demanded.

Mike offered a forlorn sigh and a headshake in reply. "You three really need to get it together."

"What are you talking about, dude?" asked a hesitant Steve.

Mike didn't accept the faux bafflement and gave him a flat look. His eyes turned and pinned Jonathan in place, but the older boy just ducked his head and blushed.

"You can't keep going on like this. It would be painful to see if it wasn't so boring."

Jonathan's head snapped up as rancor roiled in his eyes. "And what do you know about it?"

"More than you think."

Jonathan tilted his head in confusion and stared.

"Uh, what are we talking about?" Steve asked.

Mike rolled his eyes so hard, he thought they just might fall out. "What I'm *not* talking about is how you look at my sister like you just won the grand prize at the state fair. What I'm *not* talking about is that you knock out anyone who even looks at Jonathan funny. What I *am* talking about is what all of you know, but refuse to discuss."

"Shut up, Mike," Nancy hissed. "You don't understand."

He ignored her. "What I *am* talking about, Steve, is the way you tap out *I Love You* in Morse code on my sister's thigh while you're

watching TV. What I *am* talking about is the look in your eyes when you push Jonathan's bangs off his forehead. What I'm *talking about* is how much you love each other."

Nancy curled a lip as Jonathan blanched.

"Oh, that," Steve said dismissively.

"What!" the other three cried.

Steve shrugged. "Well, we don't really *need* to talk about it, do we? I mean, it's pretty obvious."

Nancy gave him an incredulous look.

"Huh?" gasped an alarmed Jonathan.

Steve only had eyes for Mike. "Thanks, little dude, but we don't need an intervention. We only have to kill another year in this town before we get out and go someplace where no one cares." His eyes turned thoughtful. "Johnny wants to go to NYU. New York is cool. Maybe Paris." He shrugged again. "Whatever."

"Are you kidding?" Jonathan barked.

Steve held up his hands. "Okay, so Paris is out. I don't speak French anyway."

"He's insane," Nancy mumbled, shaking her head.

Steve glared. "I'm not crazy for loving you guys, no matter what you or anyone else thinks."

"That's not ..." Nancy started.

"It's not ..." Jonathan tried.

"It's not crazy," Steve said softly, "when we're watching the game and you're curled up at my side and Johnny's sitting between my legs, my fingers carding his hair. It's not crazy when my heart seizes up in my chest and then tries to leap out my throat when I watch you two kiss. It's not crazy that I know you watch Johnny and I sleep in

each other's arms."

He shook his head. "That's *not* crazy. That's love. I love you, both of you, so just deal with it!"

Mike was mildly surprised that it was Jonathan and not Nancy who began crying.

"The three of you went through Hell together," he whispered, "and you came out of it. You survived. Maybe not completely, there might be pieces missing, but whatever you lost is so much less than what you found in each other. Don't lose it because you're afraid. Don't be like me."

"Mikey?" Nancy warbled.

His chin trembled as he fought with himself until, finally, he could no longer hold it in.

"El," he gasped, before swallowing heavily. He closed his eyes and dropped his head, but not before they saw the tears slipping down his cheeks. "And Will."

He heard a sharp intake of breath which he assumed was from Jonathan. He quickly wiped his face and cleared his throat.

"It's too late for me, but it doesn't have to be that way for you." He backed away when Nancy stood. "Don't. I'll be okay. I want you to be, too."

He quickly crossed to the threshold, anxious to escape into the basement. He suddenly halted and looked over his shoulder.

"Nothing is hopeless; we must hope for everything." A small smile appeared on his face. "Euripides."